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Camball - Remarks, ... Library Assistants Association



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REMARKS ADDRESSED TO  
THE MEMBERS OF THE  
LIBRARY ASSISTANTS' ASSO-  
CIATION, SEPTEMBER 18, 1895.

*Campbell, Francis Bunbury Fitzgerald*

FRANK CAMPBELL.

"And yet, on the other hand, it is never to be forgotten that Ideals do exist; that if they be not approximated to at all, the whole matter goes to wreck! Infallibly."—CARLYLE.



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MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

I NEED hardly say that it is a very great pleasure to me to be here this evening, and I feel it a special honour to have been asked to address you on this, the first of what will, I trust, be a very long series of similar gatherings to promote the *social, intellectual, and professional* interests of the members of the Library Assistants' Association. Your President, Mr. Peddie, suggested that my remarks should refer to the "Education of the Librarian," and I think that you will agree that this is a subject eminently suitable as the keynote of the future, and one especially desirable for this evening's consideration. But, for this reason, that this is, in a sense, an inaugural meeting, I think it would be scarcely becoming on my part if I did not take the present opportunity to congratulate you on the successful issue of the efforts of the gentlemen who compose your Committee, mentioning especially Mr. Fortune, your late Secretary (who is, I believe, practically

the founder of the Association), and Mr. Peddie. Your Committee have met—well, I would not like to say how many times—as reported to me, and this fact alone augurs well for the future. I think it does them great credit that they have successfully steered the Association through the initial difficulties which such an Association must always encounter, and I trust that they will continue to receive your full confidence and support in the future.

Library education being, then, the subject for this evening, I have been considering what aspects of the question I should touch upon. I came to the conclusion that it would be unwise of me to attempt to treat in detail the work connected with the ordinary routine of the public libraries; firstly, because it is a subject on which you already probably know more than I do; secondly, because it would not be possible for me to treat the several sections of it fully in one evening.

It seemed to me therefore that I might help you better if I considered the subject from a *general* point of view; for successful librarianship depends more upon the development of the individual character than on technical knowledge and experience alone. And this is all the truer, because the “librarian” is not *one* person, but many—for many are the parts which he has to play. We are all aware that the popular definition

of a librarian is "a man who indexes books ;" but *we* know that librarianship involves—well, just a few other considerations, and so we smile and pass on our way.

In approaching, then, my subject, I place myself in the position, not of the senior members, but of the youngest librarian student in the room, who, finding himself on the threshold of a library career, asks himself: *What am I to do?*

This is a most important question to ask and to answer, for unless we clearly understand the nature of the duties expected of librarians, we can scarcely attempt to perform them. And in trying to answer the question, it seemed to me that my best way would be to view the librarian in his several characters, reverently following the idea of a work which you will easily recognize.

I commence then with

#### THE YOUNG LIBRARIAN: HIS GENERAL EDUCATION.

WHAT is it that librarians expect of their assistants when they first enter the profession? I think perhaps that their expectations are best defined by the questions they ask: "Is he intelligent? Is he quick?"

What a difference there is between the various

characters with which we meet ! and how refreshing it is to meet with one who has plenty of *go* in him, *quick* to grasp the situation, *ready* to act at a moment's notice, *brisk* in his actions—in a word, *smart* at his work. This, then, is one of the first qualities to be desired : *Quickness of Perception and plenty of Spirit*—and none of that sluggardly disposition which is listless, without energy, and always asleep, thus needing perpetually to be aroused to a sense of its own existence.

The next point which a librarian notices is the grace of *Willingness*. What a difference there is between the one who readily and cheerfully offers his help on every possible occasion—even before it is asked—and the other who hangs back and does only that which he is actually compelled to do.

Continuing, I need hardly say next that *Accuracy* is one of the chief qualities required in a librarian. Alas ! we could do well with a few more Henry Bradshaws in the past, for witness the number of slovenly catalogues which have been spoilt for want of accuracy, thus rendering it eventually necessary for all the work to be done over again. Unless a librarian can rely upon the accuracy of his subordinates, half his time is occupied in remedying their defects.

You will think it unnecessary for me to mention the word *Civility*, and yet it is one which is fre-

quently ignored, and which is nevertheless of great importance. I do not mean civility to "readers," for I believe "readers" have seldom to complain on this head, but I mean civility amongst colleagues, and I lay great stress upon this point, for this reason, that the want of it may easily impede the work of a department; for if one man is persistently rude to another, the probable consequence will be that there will be a cessation of intercourse between the two,—and in a library, where one librarian may frequently have to consult another, and where it is extremely necessary for the whole staff to work well together, this may easily become a serious matter.

But when I have mentioned these qualities, more generally looked for in candidates for vacant posts, I would especially emphasize the individual necessity for the cultivation of original powers of thought. Wisdom lies, not only in the *accumulation of facts*, but in the *appreciation of principles*. This it is which especially distinguishes one man from another—the quick grasp of principles or laws. This quality it is which most chiefly enables the same man to administer one department of state after another without any previous experience of the same. A man who possesses this quality will generally reveal it by going to the point at once, and by asking the proper questions on meeting with a new situation.



These appear to me to be some of the chief points connected with the general education and development of a young librarian. But there is his

#### TECHNICAL EDUCATION

to consider. This I shall refer to generally at the end of my remarks. I will only say now that it is very necessary for a librarian to keep clear in his mind the natural divisions of his work, and thus be able to add to his knowledge methodically day by day. Thus he will mark the different branches of the subject of library administration. He will mark the natural divisions of bibliography, such as those of:

- I. General Literature.
- II. Official Literature.
- I. Classical Bibliography.
- II. Modern Bibliography.

He will bear in mind the division of the stream of literature, *i.e.*, as evidenced by the parallel existence of "separate" works, and of works which are "collected" in ordinary non-periodical series, in the journals of learned societies, and in the pages of periodical magazines; and he will be seeking to add to his stock of knowledge on the subjects of "cataloguing" and "classification." In regard to these latter subjects it is especially



necessary for him to make a perpetual study of the *kinds* of catalogues and indexes required by bibliographers.

Among the many existing definitions of "genius," Dr. Johnson has defined it as a proper knowledge of "the use of tools,"<sup>1</sup> and if he had referred to genius of librarianship only,—well, he might have done worse. We do not even yet understand our tools, gentlemen, and there is a future for any young librarian who will study their use scientifically.

I will not now remark upon the study of the "theory" of bibliography, beyond saying that I have never yet seen a suitable guide to the subject. I have myself always avoided the old disquisitions on the matter, because they always give me a headache, and I should be very sorry to condemn you to their study, for I am convinced that you would get up from your chairs more bewildered than when you sat down!

I come now to

#### THE LIBRARIAN AS A MAN OF BUSINESS.

A LIBRARY is a huge machine, the wheel of which is ever turning in the silent process of the receiving of books, and the disposing of them.

It is obvious, then, that a librarian must be a

<sup>1</sup> "Genius is nothing more than knowing the use of tools; but there must be tools for it to use."

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*Man of Business*, for a single hitch in the machine may affect the work of the whole department ; and nowhere are business-like habits more conspicuous than in the arrangement of books and papers in actual use. A man's table is the index to his mind. If, therefore, his books and papers are always in confusion, the general conclusions to be derived are that his brain is in a similar condition. I need hardly say, then, that one of the chief requisites in a young librarian is that he should from the very earliest moment endeavour to acquire methodical habits of business. And this is all the more necessary because, as you know, it is often very difficult ; for libraries become overcrowded with books ; the staff may be overworked ; acquisitions increase quicker than they can be dealt with ; and thus arrears accumulate. And when once arrears accumulate, all the business-like habits of a man are put to the test, in order to prevent confusion and maintain order.

But it is not only with reference to the *interior* of a library that business habits are required, but in regard to the *chaos* which reigns supreme in the outer world of bibliography. In the words of Carlyle :

"This which we now have, that Chaos should sit umpire . . . this is the worst."

I must also allude to the value of business-like habits in another department of librarian life—



that is, in the internal economy of an association such as the one which I have the honour to address—I mean, in regard to the discussions which will take place on papers read. I feel it necessary to warn you against a type of un-business-like man who frequents business meetings, and who never talks to the point. Frederick Denison Maurice has alluded to the subject when he warns us against craving “for teachers who shall keep us in good humour with ourselves, not lead us to higher aims, and a more solid foundation.” Probably one of your wisest members will have just concluded reading a paper which contains years of experience and weeks of work, when up jumps a gentleman of the type I allude to, and, putting his hands in his pockets, proceeds to deliver himself thus :

“Gentlemen and Ladies, Mr. President——

“Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen—(*He looks round for applause*)—I have not heard a word which the reader of the paper has said, but I beg to say that I differ with *every* word he has said. I believe he has some new-fangled idea of improving us in our profession! Well, all I can say is that we don’t want to be improved. In my opinion, we are all a set of jolly good fellows, that’s *my* opinion, and all that we want is shorter hours and longer pay.” (*More applause?*)

Gentlemen, this is the sort of "clap-trap" which breaks up a society, and disgusts its better members so that they resign all connection with it. I trust therefore that you will not permit it in *your* Association, and that should this type of man ever arise, you will speedily "sit on him!"

#### THE LIBRARIAN AS A MAN OF THE WORLD.

THERE is another aspect of the librarian's education to which I should refer, and that is one which I see you recognize, for other reasons, when you include the word "*Social*" among the objects of your society. We have to remember, in these days, that the librarian has a great many friends if he can find them; but they are not of much use if he fails to do so. And thus it is of the highest importance that the librarian of a local library shall make it his business to mix with the social life of his neighbourhood one day, in order that he may ask his neighbours for their life or money the next. I have been told of a successful firm of architects with two partners at the head of it, of which the duty of the one was to work *in* doors, while the other dined *out*! I am afraid if this were a common custom among librarians, there might be some difference of opinion as to which was to do which? But this sufficiently illustrates

my meaning that a librarian should take up his position in his locality, and thus secure more help and co-operation than he otherwise might obtain.

#### THE LIBRARIAN AS A MAN OF IDEALS.

I NEXT pass on to the consideration of the librarian as a man with an *Ideal*.

I believe that it is generally considered highly improper for a man to have a "Mission" in life, but it is graciously permitted to him to have an "*ideal*"—at least, in fiction it is; and it is perhaps fortunate that at least this is allowed him—if he is to do good work,—for without ideals we shall lack enthusiasm, and as you know, little can be done without Enthusiasm, the mother of Arts. This is one of the many reasons why I strongly advocate that every facility and encouragement should be given to women librarians,—because the ladies are conspicuous by their enthusiasm.

Lord Beaconsfield has said that :

"The youth who does not look up will look down, and the spirit that does not soar, is destined, perhaps, to grovel."

And these are words which we do well to remember—and especially so in these days when we hear it not unfrequently stated that the proudest position of the librarian is to consider himself

“the servant of the public,” or “the public servant.” It is true that there is a sense in which we may be a man’s “servant” and yet his “chief,” but this is a different application of the moral.

I am at present alluding to the so-called librarian who takes a pride in assuming that his functions do not call upon him to exercise his judgment or discretion, but simply to supply that which the public demands—as an automatic machine.

Gentlemen, the place for automatic machines (with apologies to the indicator) is on the Underground Railway, and not in the library. If I were a caricaturist, I should be sorely tempted to picture such a man with a black coat and a silk hat, dragged along by a very long nose and—shall I add—two long ears, by a rabble with no coats and no hats,—and all the time a silly look of painful pleasure on his countenance, as he tries to comfort himself with the assurance that he is fulfilling the highest duty of his existence! Gentlemen, this is not *my* conception of the functions of a librarian, and I do not think that it is *yours*. *My* conception of a librarian is that he is not only a *Guardian of Literature*, but a *Guide to Literature*; and in so being, we must not forget that we have our duties towards the past, as well as to the present and future generations. Of what use that we are the inheritors of a glorious literature, if we are to

rest content that the works of genius are to moulder on our bookshelves, while works of inferior merit are greedily devoured? And in regard to the present, we must remember that,—especially in the crowded cities of our country,—we have to do our best to save our readers from their own ignorance, and *not* to rest satisfied, and shield ourselves behind it. This is the only reason of our existence. This is why we fill posts as librarians. We are placed in charge of libraries, because we are supposed to know more than other people—that we may be their guides through the mazes of literature, and not leave them to flounder about by themselves. That our efforts shall be successful throughout the country is dependent on the co-operation of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, on popular lectures, and on personal intercourse with the readers, and, above all, by a judicious selection of books; and I trust that the day will come when the success of the library movement will be judged, not by the number of books in the free public library, but by the number of books kept in the home.

#### THE LIBRARIAN AS A MAN OF CULTURE.

I WOULD now like to say a few words on the librarian as a man of culture; for this is by no means the least of a librarian's duties; for until

every town contains a museum and art-gallery, the library must be the true centre of culture.

Granting that the first duty of a librarian is to fall in love with the soul of his books—the next to learn to know in what consists the *true outward beauty* of a book—and, having acquired this new sense, he is bound not to keep his treasure to himself, not to rest content with his knowledge and the ignorance of other people, but to endeavour his utmost to learn how to *transmit* that sense of beauty to the eyes of others, that they may behold it as he beholds it. With this object, he must take every opportunity of examining the fine art books and manuscripts of every age (of which there is such a wealth at the British Museum); he must learn to appreciate the genuine, honest, and patient effort exhibited in the material and texture of the best specimens of art, and the workmanship bestowed; he must train his eye to appreciate good type and good arrangement of type when he sees it, *and be able to say wherein that goodness consists*; he must learn to appreciate good illustrations, *and be able to say wherein their goodness lies*; he must know when he sees good binding,<sup>1</sup> good tooling, *and*

<sup>1</sup> In reference to book-bindings, and the power of transmitting sensations of beauty, I think it only due to Mr. Davenport of the British Museum to express my conviction that public exhibitions of the exquisite series of lantern slides which he has

*must be able to say why the decoration of one book is good, and that of another bad.* This is a high ideal, to which few of us can attain, but nevertheless we must aim at it. But in all this I must add one word of warning. You may be lovers of the beautiful in books, but *do* not degenerate into mere pedantic worshippers of the rare and curious.

But, more than this,—a librarian should have a soul for the beautiful in *everything*, and *especially* for the architectural beauty and fitness, exterior and interior, of his own library.

And not only for architecture do I plead, but for all the arts; for is he not the guardian of their records, and shall he not know something of their treasures? These tend in part to make the sunshine of a librarian's life, and to relieve the frequent monotony of it. In fine, if a librarian is to inspire a love of literature and art in others, he must first be smitten with it himself.

#### A SYSTEM OF TRAINING FOR LIBRARIANS.

I HAVE now dealt with what appear to me to be some of the more important educational aspects of the character of the ideal librarian. But there is

prepared will do more to instil a due love and reverence for good book-bindings than any other means I know of, short of living with the books themselves.

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yet this very vital question to bring before you, viz. : the institution of a regular system of preliminary training for young librarians. So far as I understand the situation, matters are at present at a sort of deadlock. The Library Association has considered the subject of the training of library assistants generally in the past, and has undertaken to examine candidates if they "present themselves" for examination. These words "*present themselves*" are important, for, if I am rightly informed, no one ever does "present" himself—or only a very small percentage of persons !

And, gentlemen, I confess that I am not altogether surprised, for it appears to me that the experience of young librarians in their endeavours to equip themselves for the fight is most discouraging. Their hours of work are long, their hours of recreation short, and there is little time left for any regular study of the *science* of their profession.

As regards the *hours*, my strong conviction is that librarians, and what is more important, library committees, will find it to their benefit to take special means to enable their library assistants to increase their own efficiency. I believe that there are already many librarians endeavouring to do so, of whom our chairman (Mr. Inkster) is one. I trust that, before long, they *all* will find it possible so to do.



I am encouraged in this hope, moreover, because I believe that it is but the similar experience of other professions. Here is, for instance, what the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects said in 1894, in the course of an address to students of architecture :

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“The air is full of educational courses, curricula, syllabi, lectures, and classes, and the remarkable success which many of these have attained demonstrates how much they were needed. The creation and continuing elaboration of such educational facilities has materially altered the relations which formerly existed between master and pupil. It is true that students must to some extent take advantage of such facilities after office hours ; but I think that, in receiving a pupil and accepting a premium with him, *a master is now bound, not merely to extend to him the advantages of training in his office, but, in addition, to recognize the existence of educational institutions outside, and to afford to his pupils reasonable facilities for profiting by them.*”<sup>1</sup>

But, even supposing that a library assistant finds time for special study, what line of study is he to take up ? Who is to advise him ? What textbooks are there to help him ? What connection

<sup>1</sup> The italics are inserted.

will there be between his studies and the examinations which it may be desirable for him to pass? What incentive is there for him to make a special effort on his own behalf? I am afraid there is no answer to these questions at present.

Well, gentlemen, to cut the matter short, all this points to the necessity for a *system* of education. And if any librarian complains that the suggestion is a reflection on his own powers of training, and will tend to produce stereotyped librarians, I answer: "You will not decline him when you see him; and, after all, you are not obliged to take him, any more than he is obliged to go to you. It is impossible for you yourself to devote the requisite time to personally superintending any more than a fraction of his studies. They do not make these objections in America, so why should we, *here*?"

But how is such a system of education to be initiated, and on what lines? Well, in answer to this, I see those in the room who will have something to say. Both Miss James and Miss Petherbridge have, I believe, a considerable knowledge of the methods prevailing in America. Miss Petherbridge was the first, I believe, to read a paper on the subject at the Belfast Meeting, and touched on the same question again at the Cardiff Meeting of the Library Association.

Mr. Peddie has also his views as to the relation-

